"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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THE RURAL WAY OF LIFE

What Can the Church Contribute to It?

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The rural way of life is exceedingly important to the Christian Church. Looking at it from any one of the many angles of interest that we are presenting in this discussion, it will be readily seen that the things that are basic to rural life are also basic in the life of the church.

The rural way of life is also an important factor in the national enterprise. In spite of the terrific changes that are occurring and that are affecting rural life today as drastically as the city, the fact is that something essentially rural remains out of which we may conserve the basic values of our American Democracy.

In order that we may do this, however, it will be necessary to see rural life in its total setting, to appraise the changes that are upon it, to sense the social and economic significance of these changes, to understand the distinctive characteristics of rural life and its people, and to reinspire the church to undertake its task as a social, moral, and spiritual force so that the best in rural life may be preserved and that into it we may infuse certain newer values arising out of recent experience.

1. Economic Change

The recent social changes are many and varied, but basic to them all is the change in agriculture and the economic structure. During the first war there came a great stimulus to American agriculture. The Allies looked to America for food, and agricultural production was speeded up to where the feeding of sixty millions of people in addition to our own population was an accomplished fact.

The result of this temporary prosperity is too well known to require even a brief comment. Heavy investments in land and machinery, the expansion of social utilities, all good and necessary, involved payment under mortgages on the future that became a burden too heavy for many to bear and terminated in consequent selling out at terrific loss and, in many instances, in moving out. The decrease in farm capital in one decade amounted to twenty billions of dollars. The effect of this economic debacle on rural life must be kept in mind if we desire to understand and help the situation. The passing of the land out of the hands of individual farm

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families and into the hands of insurance companies and great corporations is a matter of vital concern and must be seen and understood in its spiritual implications.

2. National Policy

A second far-reaching change in rural life is in local and national policies. The very success of agricultural technique made overproduction acute in the period following the first World War. Readjustments were increasingly necessary under a regime of commercial agriculture. Agricultural adjustment acts were imperative to bring about some sort of control. We do not like controls, but if some such measures had not been enforced, it is likely that farm people would have been reduced to an even lower standard of living. It was low enough in all sincerity, but it would have been even lower had it not been for some of these controls. Until we have adjusted our total economy so as to enable the masses to have the purchasing power to buy what the farmer is able to produce, overproduction will only result in sales prices less than costs of production.

World War No. II has changed all of this temporarily; it is now in reverse. We are producing much more food with a greatly reduced rural population, and the end is not yet. It is even possible that we may maintain this production for some time after the termination of the war. This will all be to the good, for rural as well as city people. But we cannot expect this program of agricultural production to continue for a very long period after the war. To be sure, we must help to feed a ravaged world, but only until such time as the rest of the war-impoverished world can get on its feet. We should be more concerned to help the world feed itself. National policy should be able to bring about a gradual reduction in production and an orderly adjustment in the prices of agricultural products in the home market, so that we will not repeat the tragic experience that followed the last World War. To this end the Farm Security Administration should be sustained.

3. The Enlarged Rural Community

The third change that must be understood is a change of scale. The old rural community, characterized by a restricted geographical area and its small, compact social grouping, somewhat isolated, is giving way to a greatly enlarged area. The old geographical area is too small to supply the resources necessary to provide the improved institutions now demanded. In this new social area there is a merging of town, village, and open country. These enlarged communities have come into existence because of the widening boundaries of service centers, the trade community, the school community, newspapers, automobiles, and telephones. This unifying of the larger area of town and country is one of the most drastic changes that has taken place. It offers the way to bring to rural life all the resources now necessary to give the satisfactions of health, education, social and recreational life, also religion.

4. Social Change

These problems all are reflected in the realm of human relations. How to help people keep ahead of the material and physical universe in its rapid development -- this is the basic question. We always have the problem of making the necessary adjustments in human conduct that will enable man to bring spiritual guidance and moral control to bear upon the educational, economic, and social processes of life. Rural life is no exception to the rule. Social developments have been later in arriving in the rural community, but they are here now, and there is not a village or a hamlet that is not affected by these changes.

We are told that our problem is due, in the main, to the fact that we have developed the physical sciences out of all proportion to the advancement of man

ward control of these sciences in his own best interests and for the good of so-ety; he has neglected the social sciences and religion. The result has been the struction of those values in the rural community life that are fundamental to a rthy civilization.

5. Rural Values

These values are primary in a nation's life. Children, the home, the land, and e community, these are values that are to be created and conserved in rural life. e last census revealed that we are still dependent upon our rural areas for the ntribution of children. Cities do not recreate themselves. With few exceptions e cities all lost population at the point of birthrate during the last census riod. They gained, where they did increase, by the process of the transfer of ral people into the cities.

The home comes next. It is the foundation of all real progress. To maintain ne family-sized farm, with its home and all that goes with it, is a primary objective which the nation must give of its time and attention. John Ruskin once said, That is the richest and strongest nation that can point to the largest number of appy and contented farm homes."

But a tragic thing is happening to the family-sized farm. The family farms are eing rapidly abolished and large corporation farms operated by machinery, with ligrant labor, are taking the place of the family farm. This is not in the best nterests of community life, religious institutions, or the ultimate life of the na-ion. The church should be concerned and conduct a vigorous campaign to maintain he family farms of America.

Therefore, the land, mother earth, is still the determining factor. Wherever nation has allowed its soil to deteriorate it has gone down on the scrap heap. n impoverished soil means an impoverished people. We have been wasters of the oil and now must pay the price of rebuilding its fertility if future generations re to survive.

The community idea is a religious one. Upon it depends much of the future of emocracy, for the community is the unit from which democracy will continue to de-ive that sharing experience without which democracy becomes merely a word to use on atriotic occasions. There is little hope that democracy can be achieved in our great ities. They are lacking in those community units in which the people can partic-pate. The church in rural America must then, by all means, become more and more a community institution. Too many churches, alas, are not concerned about the commun-ity as such; they exist to preserve and protect their own institutional existence. But according to their own gospel they will have their reward: "For he that saveth his life shall lose it."

There are many values that are still possible in rural life, and they are the kind upon which any lasting civilization depends.

6. Religion

The role of the church in the realm we have presented must be very clear. In the economic change it is to prepare the people to make the necessary adjustments. We are facing the necessity of modifying our economy to the needs of a democratic order. In other words an economic democracy is now in the making and is fundamental to our political democracy. Rural people need to be informed regarding the problems involved and, in particular, to see their deep religious implications. The Arch-bishop of York in a recent article said, "But I do not believe that a federal system can of itself secure justice or even abolish war unless the economic life of men is

ordered on principles more expressive of fellowship than at present. The trend toward war is inherent in the economy of the modern nation. The profit motive has become the dominant motive. It is this which has led to the sacrilegious sacrifice of rural England to urban interests and subjects it to policies framed for urban conditions. It has turned man into an economic animal."

In the realm of national policy the church again has a mission to perform to rural people. It is largely educative but also involves a loyal cooperation on the part of rural people. They must, however, be fully informed concerning the national program and helped to see it, not in terms of party politics, but rather as a process of human behavior with checks and balances necessary to the welfare of all. This applies in a peculiar way in the realm of the many agricultural extension activities that are now an accepted program in all the states. The church can help by inspiring its people to cooperate in these important activities, which in turn will help to bring resources to the church itself. Farm Bureau, Home Bureau, 4-H Clubs and many other agencies may all be used by the church as avenues of education and culture and for community betterment.

In relation to the enlarging community, the church can again be a factor of primary importance. Churches have been the last institutions to make the adjustment. The school, the social life, and other important aspects of rural living have already made the necessary changes, but with few exceptions the church is struggling along with a unit of life that was designed to meet the needs of the horse-and-buggy community. The Larger Parish Plan has proved to be a valuable instrument that churches can well use in meeting this need of an enlarged community. The program that was effective for the small-hamlet community having but few interests proves entirely inadequate for the holding together of people scattered over a wider area, who all need the spiritual dynamic to bring them into a coordinated, cooperative unity. The outpost Sunday school program is an important part of the Larger Parish movement. It is the extension of the church that parallels the extension program of other rural agencies and is one of the important elements in a program of service to people who are living in the marginal areas of the community.

In the realm of rural values the church has a supreme mission of interpretation and activity. Rural people themselves do not appreciate the significance of what they represent in the national picture and the degree to which they may help determine civilization. Moreover, they must be helped at the point of getting more of life's satisfactions out of their so-called "common" things. If rural life cannot be brought to the place where it will accept these values of childhood, the home, the land, and the community as primary, and as those in which life will find its deepest satisfactions, then there is little to be said. At this point the rural church has its greatest opportunity. These values are the seed-beds and also the reservoirs of the things of the spirit. Wise and happy is the preacher of the Gospel who has discovered these avenues of spiritual strength and is using them.

One word in conclusion. We have said little about religion in the old traditional sense, but throughout we have been conscious of the fundamental truths that religion represents, which are necessary to all we have been saying. All life is sacred. This is the thought that must now possess us. Some of the older religious emphases have lost their once commanding influence. They are not as convincing as once they were. But it is also true that a new and more acceptable religion is arising out of the old. It still awaits the driving force of strong convictions, and the embodiment in formulae and organization that will make for effective action in the life of the rural community. Rural churches must find a way to cooperate in order that those who have the sustaining spiritual faith may work together to make the Kingdom of God a reality in rural America.

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